

**Minutes of the meeting of the Northampton College Corporation
held at 1700 hours on 2nd May 2024**

Present: Helen Scott (Chair), Pat Brennan Barrett (Principal), Steve Bunker (Staff), Neus Garriock, Philip Hilton, Anne-Marie Kilday, Paul Nutter [via Teams], David Smith [via Teams] Julie Teckman and Rod Wood

In attendance: Gary Brough [via Teams] (Vice Principal, Resources), Geraldine Hulley (Temporary Clerk), Jan Hutt (Vice Principal, People and Organisational Development), Jason Lancaster [via Teams] (Principal Elect), Patrick Leavey (Deputy Principal) and Julian Wood (Deputy Principal – Financial and Corporate Affairs)

SECTION A - GOVERNANCE AND ROUTINE ITEMS:

39/24 Welcome and introductions (Agenda item 1a)

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, in particular, Neus Garriock recently appointed independent governor and Geraldine Hulley (Clerk – Temporary). Thanks were extended to those colleagues who were joining via Teams. The Chair extended very best wishes on behalf of the Corporation to Ralph Devereux.

The Chair reported on two changes to the agenda:

- a. Item 13 – Governance: this would be carried forward to the June Corporation meeting; and,
- b. Item 14 – urgent business: this would be presented by Gary Brough, VP, R at 5.30pm.

40/24 Apologies for absence (Agenda item 1b)

Apologies were received from David Bailey, Becky Bradshaw, Mark Robbins Geraldine Schofield and Mike Watkins.

41/24 Declarations of interest (Agenda item 1c)

There were no declarations of interest.

42/24 Minutes (Agenda item 2)

- a. **Corporation:** The minutes of the meeting held on 29th February 2024 had been circulated previously and were approved as a true and accurate record. There were no matters arising.
- b. **Audit:** The minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 21st March 2024 had been circulated previously. With the exception of a typographical error on page 1 (change year to 2024), the minutes were noted by the Corporation as a true and accurate record.
- c. **Matters arising:** The Principal confirmed that a meeting had been held with Janet Baines, Director of Finance and Planning at the University of Northampton. Due to work commitments, she was unable to be a full Corporation member but had kindly agreed to be considered as a co-opted member of the Audit Committee subject to Corporation approval. A conversation had also been held with the Chair of the Audit Committee.

Resolved: To receive the minutes of the last Corporation and Audit Committee meetings; to approve the appointment of Janet Baines as co-opted member of the Audit Committee; and, induction arrangements to be confirmed (**Action 1 – Clerk**).

SECTION B – BUSINESS ITEMS:

43/24 Principal's Report (Agenda item 3)

The Principal provided an update on progress with achievement of each of the College's strategic objectives including a detailed narrative which complemented the RAG ratings. Governors' attention was drawn to the following:

- a. **Strategic objective 1: Quality, Teaching Learning and Skills:** Four priorities within this objective continued to be recorded as Green. Highlights included: strong in-year retention for all age groups; evidence of interventions positively impacting on closing performance gaps across all student groups; and, 95.1% of lesson observations were good or better. Francesca Henry, Well Being and Mental Health Practitioner had won an Inspirational Educator in Mental Health Education award from the Educators' Trust; a letter of congratulations would be sent to her (**Action 2 – Principal**). A team of four students had won joint first place at The Green Future Challenge for FE. The one priority that remained as Amber was in relation to English and Maths. Attendance was improving at 79% against a target of 88%. The College was cognisant of the challenges for this cohort of learners including challenges associated with Covid. The College remained committed to ensuring that all of students had the opportunity to succeed.
- b. **Strategic objective 2: Be an Effective and Productive College:** All four priorities within this objective continued to be recorded as Green. Highlights included: strong application numbers for the next academic year; very good data; the Director of MIS was retiring but following a recruitment process, a very good appointment had been made; and, robust arrangements were in place to ensure a successful transition would be made.
- c. **Strategic objective 3: Be the College in the Community Drive the Economy:** All four priorities within this objective continued to be recorded as Green. An incredible amount of work had been completed over the last ten years; the College was now self-assessing as a Grade 1. It was hoped that the forthcoming Ofsted visit would confirm this as either Good with outstanding features or Outstanding.

The Corporation thanked the Principal for her comprehensive report which provided very good levels of assurance.

Resolved: To receive the Principal's report.

44/24 Any other business (Agenda item 14):

This was recorded as a confidential item.

45/24 Finance Report and Management Accounts (Agenda item 4)

The Management Accounts (P8) had been restated to show performance against the revised budget approved by the Corporation in February 2024. The report showed a decrease of £150k in EBITDA (earnings before interest depreciation and tax) and operating surplus. EBITDA was forecasted at £1,965K (5.6%) compared to £2,115k (6%) in the revised budget. Operating surplus was projected to be £1,501k (4.3% compared to £1,651k (4.7%) in the revised budget. The College's income forecast was £94k below the revised budget with the main reasons cited as: reductions for Adult Education Budget and Additional Learning Support elements where there was less demand; and, reductions in income from Advanced Learner Loans. The DP, FCA confirmed that based on these management accounts the College's projected

Financial Health rating would remain as outstanding although the headroom against the EBITDA measure had reduced. Pay costs would remain at the revised budget figure. Where Capital Balances were concerned, due to a combination of delays and some project costs being lower than forecasted, the team was projecting an underspend against previous allocations. Plans to utilise these ahead of the final expenditure dates were either in place or being developed as part of the capital programme linked to the 2024-25 budget. Unspent allocations were included within the current year-end cash forecast.

In response to a question about the Government's likely decision to withdraw student allowance funding and any impact on the College, governors were informed that the College – in common with the FE sector – had a different system in place. If a student needed support but did not receive a disability allowance, the College may choose to provide support as a discretionary process.

46/24 Tuition Fees and Charges Policy 2024-25 (Agenda item 5)

The Corporation was responsible for approving the policy on tuition and associated fees on an annual basis. The College sets fees and public funding would then remit those fees for eligible courses/qualifications and students. Fee remission was given effect by the funding the College received through funding allocations and other DfE funding streams. The level and scope of tuition fees were largely determined by DfE funding regulations and guidance. The policy had been updated since 2023-24 to reflect changes in funding rules or areas where practice had demonstrated some clarity in the policy would be helpful. The policy had also been updated for changes in dates, roles and similar minor points. More significant updates were highlighted relating to: course cancellations; clarification on refunds; apprenticeship funding; charges for non-return of College property; and, end-point assessment resits.

In response to a question about 'other fees and charges' in paragraph 5.2, a governor challenged whether a student should be expected to pay for something that was integral to their course. The DP, FCA confirmed that charges were allowable and the policy allowed a certain level of flexibility as field trips and/or residential programmes could vary in size and scale.

47/24 Treasury Management Policy (Agenda item 6)

There was a requirement for this policy to be approved on an annual basis. The main substantive changes related to: clearer statement on key principles; a change on stance to borrowing; a reference to the use of Finance Leases; changes to investment options; and, certain changes to minimise the risk of inconsistencies. The policy had previously been scrutinised by the Audit Committee; two actions from that meeting had been incorporated. The Audit Committee recommended the Corporation to approve the Treasury Management Policy.

In response to a question about the appointment of suitably qualified professional advisors the DP, FCA confirmed that as discussed with the Audit Committee, the intention remained to appoint advisors. The Corporation requested that the new co-optee to the Audit Committee should be invited to feedback on the Policy (**Action 3 – DP, FCA**).

Resolved: To receive the Period 8 Management Accounts; to approve the Tuition Fees and Charges Policy 2024-25; and, to approve the Treasury Management Policy.

47/24 Learning Data Monitoring (Agenda item 7)

- a. **Retention:** Good overall performance with all ages currently at 96.7%; final end of year overall position should be close to 95%. Some caveats linked to a concentrated period of assessments and examinations; and, pronounced levels of mental health, well-being and resilience concerns. Some challenges associated with maintaining full timetables in a small number of areas due to staff illness, staff retention and recruitment remained. It was rare that any class would be cancelled; there had been a significant requirement to call on colleagues to cover classes.
- b. **Attendance:** This was broadly similar to the previous year overall with better engagement with main qualifications and mathematics; there was a 1% fall in English. Significant efforts were being made to keep students engaged in learning. The highest number of candidates were expected to complete GCSEs this year: approximately 1,500 for mathematics and 1,200 for English. A whole range of initiatives were in place to support students. Some of the timetabled provision would need to be closed down due to the high number of students and that some students would need access to independent rooms.
- c. **Progress:** A RAG rated table provided a detailed overview in relation to student progress according to school and level. Where the RAG ratings were concerned, the Deputy Principal confirmed that those rated Amber or Red were where interventions were focused. Regular curriculum monitoring meetings provided a forum for curriculum managers to report on progress that students were making. The data in the report provided some confidence that, as things stood, students were overall on track with their studies thus giving some assurance about likely achievement.
- d. **Outcomes for students:** A new table had been included in the report. The data confirmed that the College was now the fifth best College for student outcomes in the country. This was a testament to the impressive work of everyone that had been completed to date.

Corporation members welcomed the report commenting on the high levels of support that students could expect if required. The Chair asked that the Corporations thanks were extended to all the professional services staff and teachers. This result was very impressive.

Resolved: To receive the report on Learning Data Monitoring.

48/24 Human Resources (Agenda item 9)

The report provided a summary of the HR's primary employee relations and recruitment work activity for the academic year 2022-23. Key areas highlighted in the report were: managing under-performance; managing employee concerns; employee turnover; recruitment; sickness absence; and, priorities for 2023-24.

Questions from the Corporation included:

- In relation to the five-year table provided for disciplinaries, there is still a trend for the number of cases to increase. Is there any reason for this? *The College is very robust in relation to the professional standards expected from everyone in the organisation. There have been some serious cases during the last year and the team is very quick to resolve them.*
- Stress is one of a number of reasons for causes of long-term absence, are you going to drill down and understand why this seems to be so dominant? *We are seeing more people struggle with the balance of home and work. The age demographic of our organisation is such that we have a large number of people who are balancing a whole variety of things in their lives (career, children, being a*

carer). We have an individualised approach to people and how we bring them back into the workplace. This is not an easy sector to work in; it isn't always possible to make it easier for people when they have so many competing factors. We do have a support mechanism to help people.

- In your HR team, do you have someone with specific responsibility for mental health or wellness? *There is an individual who has this responsibility. We are also seeing growth in neurodivergence. It is important that we equip managers in a different way so that we have a wider network of support for our staff and it is not one person's responsibility. The employee assistance programme is also well used.*
- You have highlighted some excellent ways in which staff are supported. Is the next stage to look at exploring how to have a more preventative approach? *It is very much about embedding ie equipping managers to be proactive in having those discussions as well as developing a culture which is more open. We have an excellent College management team who really do provide support for their teams.*

Resolved: To receive the HR 2022-23 report.

49/24 Pay review update (Agenda item 10)

The report provided a summary on the progress of the Pay Framework and Job Evaluation Project. An update on the current position in relation to job descriptions/person specifications was outlined. There were now 12 job descriptions that needed to be finalised; there were now 90 with ECC (Educational Competencies Consortium); and, the evaluation process was continuing and the rest of those outstanding (60) would be with ECC the following week. The report included a timetable for phases 2 and 3 of the project; the Corporation was given an assurance that the dates were achievable.

The Chair emphasised that this was a huge piece of work that was being undertaken; it had to be done correctly. In terms of the timeline, it had been made very clear at the start of the project that the duration was likely to be 18 months. There was a challenge at the bottom of the scales; discussions had been held with the unions. It was agreed that a communication piece was required so that all staff understood what was happening with this project (**Action 4 – VP P&OD**). A tremendous amount of work had also been completed to date in relation to supporting staff through: additional time; flexible working; and, additional period at Christmas, etc. These were messages that could be reiterated to staff in conversations outside of these meetings.

Resolved: To receive the Pay Review report.

Jan Hutt, VP P&OD left the meeting.

50/24 Immersive spaces (Agenda item 8)

The report confirmed that the use of immersive spaces combined with virtual reality technologies would lead to: enhanced engagement; improved retention; real-world application; increased organisational resilience; and, opportunities for greater specialist teaching/masterclasses. Two governors had been invited to take part in a virtual reality head-set experience earlier in the day. Both reported that the session had been very good and exciting. In one session, the governor was involved in a problem-based learning experience based on a crime scene. Both governors agreed with the benefits of this approach.

Feedback from other governors included: immersive spaces lent themselves to a positive learning experience and would help recruitment; lots of companies were now using this type of technology and should be approached to provide examples of good content; and, an acknowledgement that this experience was becoming common practice in industry.

Resolved: To receive the report on immersive spaces.

51/24 Accountability Statement (Agenda item 11)

The College was required to have its Annual Accountability Statement and Local Needs Duty approved by the Corporation. Once approved, the Accountability Statement would be submitted to the DfE by the 30th June 2024 and published on the website alongside other documentation. The Accountability Statement focused on what the College would deliver in the following year and how it intended to support local, regional and national skills needs.

Members' attention was drawn to Section 5 which provided an overview of how the College provision aligned with local and national priorities. The Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) was particularly broad; since the version of the report had been produced, there was now coverage across all priorities. A review of last year's plan was included in Section 6.1; good progress had been made. Section 6.2 confirmed a number of priorities for 2024-25 including: curriculum alignment; further work to develop digital technologies; a review of the engineering curriculum offer; sustainability and environmental leadership; and, mathematics and English.

The Corporation welcomed the report and agreed that it should be approved.

Resolved: To approve the Accountability Statement and Local Needs Duty 2024-25.

52/24 Deputy Principal Appointment (Agenda item 12)

The Principal Elect reported that following interviews held two weeks ago that an appointment had been made for the role of Deputy Principal. A College announcement would shortly be made to all staff. Three candidates were interviewed; the successful candidate had a strong track record in a high performing college and extensive experience. The start date would be the 1st August 2024. Patrick Leavey had agreed to spend some time in the autumn to support the transition phase; details were being finalised. A review of Engineering was a priority for the Principal Elect and it was hoped that Patrick Leavey would be able to provide some support with this.

Resolved: To note the report on the Deputy Principal appointment.

53/24 Date of next meeting (Agenda item 13)

Thursday, 27th June 2024 at 5.00 pm.

54/24 Any other business (Agenda item 14)

There was no other business.

Steven Bunker left the meeting 6.45 pm.